

IMPLEMENTING TAGORE'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR CREATING CORPORATE READY PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore sometimes referred to as “the Bard of Bengal” was a scholar, freedom fighter, writer, painter and great personality who immensely contributed in Indian Literature. In the late 19th century and early 20th century he reshaped the music and literature of Bengali language. He was the first non European conferred with Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems ‘Gitanjali’. Tagore supported an idea of Bengal Renaissance and persuaded people for accepting the truth through a vast portrayal of paintings, sketches, hundreds of texts, and more than two thousand songs.

In his early childhood as every child he was sent to school but he did not like as their the children were not allowed to play. He expressed his experience in classroom teaching in “The Parrot’s Training”, a bird is caged and forced text book pages to death.¹ Rabindranath Tagore, being a great personality conceived an idea of establishing a unique educational institution on the pattern of Gurukul Ashramas of the ancient-times, from primary to higher education in the lap of nature. He started giving image to his ideas in Shantiniketan, by founding an open air school where he experimented on his Upanishadic ideals of education. Tagore emphasized on reading and learning along with playing and physical exercise. He promoted that through art and creativity a man can broaden the perception of looking into the things with the study of various subjects. In Shantineketan Tagore rejuvenation of education with the dream of encouraging literacy with the imposition of social conduct.

This paper attempts to highlight the implementation of Tagore’s education philosophy in India . Rabindranath . He emphasized on the need of developing a curriculum which develop learners into international citizens. His vision was to develop the personality of the students, and learning should be done with pleasure in one’s immediate surroundings. He believed that the aim of educational institution is of intellectual development, physical development, and social development, students must be given freedom along with sensitizing them towards the human life while revolving around the nature.

Tagore is regarded as the product of both the best of Indian and Modern Western Culture. The school of wisdom is proud to have him as part of its heritage

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INTRODUCTION

“We rob the child of this earth to teach him geography; of language to teach him grammar.

His hunger is for the epic, (but) he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates.”

¹ Tagore & Pal 2004

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore, a worldwide personality is known as Gurudev, for his contribution in reshaping the Bengali literature in the late 19th century. He can be considered as a born poet, as at the tender age of eight year he composed his first poem and from that till the end he composed innumerable literature in various forms of writing. He wrote poetry in twenty five volumes, fifteen plays, ninety short stories, eleven novels, thirteen volume of essay and recited above two thousand songs, and created more than two thousand pictures and sketches.

In his childhood Tagore did not like his school because their children were not allowed to play, and he believed that reading without playing was useless. He found school life boring and developed a sense of inferiority in children because the medium of instruction being English was difficult to understand and was confined to the urban class, so he decided not to go school and preferred to continue his initial education at home. He reached to a mark where he was bestowed with the honorary degree in the late years of his life for his socio religious and cultural innovations.

Tagore analyzed that the root cause of existing problems in Indian society is the lack of education for children as the people are not aware about the importance of education in their life. He was dissatisfied with the prevailing education system which only develops the potential of being clerk in government offices in students. The education system was neither focused nor result oriented and also failed to develop the scientific attitude and sense of inquiry in students, which was the primarily required for the development of the children and the country. Tagore believed that the aim of education should be to develop creativity in students, confidence of expressing thoughts freely, feeling the joy in learning new things, and making students aware of their cultural heritage of the country, which was completely ignored in the colonial education system. The education imparted to the students was not in any way contributed in the development of education outside India.

Tagore emphasized the importance of freedom in education. He saw education as a medium of celebrating the richest aspects of other cultures, while maintaining one's own cultural specificity. As he wrote:

I was brought up in an atmosphere of aspiration, aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world”²

Tagore acquired knowledge about education and its mysteries by successfully subjecting himself to the fullest. He initiated to regenerate the people with the introduction of new educational philosophy. He advocated that the ideal teaching and learning process should be under the open sky in the lap of nature in close association with plants, trees, seasonal changes and animals which makes students connected with various forms of nature away from the disturbance of the city life. He started Santiniketan with a vision, to experiment with his type of education system.

He recommended subjects like creativity and art should be taught which helps in promoting and expanding the approach towards new things. He began the renewal of education system with the aim of promoting literacy and health with the enforcement of social conduct. He condemned the idea of expensive education which was confined to specific

² O'Connell, Kathleen(2002) *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 2002.

class of people, based on the western pattern emphasizing more on comfort less on knowledge and making education expensive for common people. He wanted class schedule to be flexible, according to the weather change, seasonal festivals, excursions as part of the curriculum. He was against bookish learning:

“Books have come between our mind and life. They deprive us of our natural faculty of getting knowledge directly from nature and life and have generated within us the habit of knowing everything through books. We touch the world not with our mind, but with our books. They dehumanize and make us unsocial.... Let the students gather knowledge and materials from different regions of the country, from direct sources and from their own independent effort”³.

Tagore criticized the idea of punishing the students for maintain discipline, which is taken as an important part of education. His perspective was to motivate the students to achieve their dreams, which will naturally develop discipline and inspire them to be focused and sincere towards work with the aim to achieve the desired goal. He suggested that the sense of responsibility will make student self disciplined.

Tagore ideology was to involve students in teaching learning process for gaining satisfactory outcome. He provided his students a platform where they can share their views and opinion in the form of painting, songs or poems. He shared his writings with the students though they were difficult for students to understand, but Tagore had a thought that the writings being complex in understanding will give students an opportunity to know and understand about the work. The students in Santiniketan were inspired to draw new painting or compose poems, with the inspiration of the famous painters and writers. He emphasized on giving freedom to the students, but having respect for his teacher “Guru”, for teacher the primary responsibility lies in helping the students understand, in knowing their inner self, which can be attained only when freedom is given to the students deriving their interest areas, from nature to pursue the gained knowledge in the sphere of their choice.

Tagore examined teachers to be playing a very important in helping young children to grow on their own, as a gardener helps the young plants to grow. An ideal educator must combine in himself the gifts of a philosopher, a poet, a mystic, a social reformer, a scientist and a veritable man of action because he has to take into account all type of men and their aspirations , all facets of the human personality , all levels of man's experience, all fields of endeavor and achievements.

Tagore's educational philosophy highlighted on advancing the education while introducing the music, literature, drama and art in the curriculum to develop the aesthetic sense in students that equally contributes in turning them to be a cultured and enlightened citizen. He said, *“We felt we would try to test everything,' he writes, 'and no achievement seemed impossible. We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side”⁴.*

Tagore focused on teaching system which holds the ability to bridge the gap between two diverse cultures, socio religious barriers, instead of studying culture of war and the dominance imposed by the powerful on weak. He strongly recommended that people of various cultures should create a large frame work which will be of great help in creating and formulating economic policies, promoting social justice and tapering the gap of rich and poor. Tagore underlined on the need of incorporating Art as part of teaching curriculum with the view that it develops affinity towards culture and environment which enrich the aesthetic imagination on universal theme.

³ Jha, Narmadeshwar (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 3/4, 1994, p. 603–19.

⁴ Tagore, Rabindranath *My Reminiscences* 1917: 141

Tagore advocated Science to be taught in India along with philosophical and spiritual knowledge in educational institutions. He supported science for human existence which leads to never ending desire for materialistic goods for living comfortable life. Science also showcase the power as it works as an instrument of war, which ends to overpower the weak nation by the powerful. So, Tagore strongly recommended scientific and spiritual knowledge important part of the curriculum.

Rabindranath Tagore initiated on the issue of family rural property in East Bengal. He became aware of the fact regarding the cultural poverty which was spread throughout the villages of East Bengal. This created a great drift between the people of villages and the educated people living in the cities. He was moved to see the socio economical miseries of the people living in the villages, which are composed in his literary work at a later date:

*“Our so-called responsible classes live in comfort because the common man has not yet understood his situation. That is why the landlord beats him. The money-lender holds him in his clutches; the foreman abuses him; the policeman fleeces him; the priest exploits him; and the magistrate picks his pocket.”*⁵

Tagore decided to work for the upliftment of people of weaker section, living in rural areas. He stressed on imparting the literary training and social work, and making them aware of the cooperative schemes, which was of great help for them. Tagore worked as a social reformer and set up a small school Vishvabharti in 1901, which later developed into a rural reconstruction center, where he experimented with his educational model rooted from his personal experience. He experimented in his school by initiating education for adult people. He wanted to invent an alternative form of education.

*In every nation, education is intimately associated with the life of the people. For us, modern education is relevant only to turning out clerks, lawyers, doctors, magistrates and policemen.... This education has not reached the farmer, the oil grinder, nor the potter. No other educated society has been struck with such disaster.... If ever a truly Indian university is established it must from the very beginning implement India's own knowledge of economics, agriculture, health, medicine and of all other everyday science from the surrounding villages. Then alone can the school or university become the centre of the country's way of living. This school must practice agriculture, dairying and weaving using the best modern methods.... I have proposed to call this school Visva Bharati.*⁶

Tagore wanted women to be given the right of education as men. They should be taught similar theoretical courses with different of practical course as their role in life differs from men. He started the co educational method of learning from Santiniketan, where young men and women were sensitized towards the insignificant social rituals, using education as a means of bringing change in society.

Tagore argued for a humane educational system, that was in touch with the environment and aimed at overall development of the personality. He believed that education is a process through which mind could grow and reach out of itself for which he established Yoga, a community of spirit with man and nature. He prioritized naturalism in formulating new educational model. Rabindranath Tagore believed:

The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely

⁵ Rupkatha Journal Vol 2 No 4 Tagore's Educational Experiments and Right to Education Bill: a Comparison p 632

⁶ Jha, Narmadeshwar (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 3/4, 1994, p. 6.

*repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead*⁷

The objective of education is to prepare an individual for participation in society, and it serves as a vehicle by which the culture of the group can be transmitted and perpetuated. Tagore's educational views can be discovered in his various writings which he expressed from his personal experience and exposure towards the problem. His ideals of education are adapted and implemented in general practice but his contribution in education is counted with his efforts of emphasizing on hormonal balance of academics and total personality development. He highlighted on the following aspects that are essential for reforming the education system

- Unity of West and East
- Natural growth in natural circumstance
- Goodbye to book-centered education
- Freedom to learner
- Teaching - practical and real
- Emphasize of aesthetic development
- Education for rural reconstruction

Analyzing on the educational issue Tagore recommended that the students must read the books of their choice along with the books related to their syllabus for school work. Tagore wrote:

*"A boy in this country has very little time at his disposal. He must learn a foreign language, pass several examinations and qualify himself for a job in the shortest possible time. So what can he do but cram up a few text bookswith breathless speed? His parents and his teachers do not let him waste precious time by reading a book of entertainment, and they snatch it away from him the moment they see him with one".*⁸

Tagore believed that the existing education system of India fail to raise in students the power of thought and imagination. The books that are the source of information neither hold any relation to the human life nor portray realistic picture of the people and their society. He showcased that in the initial years of the learning the students are made to learn and visualize those concept which generally do not resemble with the society. He warned that in such circumstances education and human life is forced to detach from each other . He writes:

"At half past ten, in the morning the factory opens with the ringing of a bell, and then as the teachers start talking, the machines start working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes and the pupil then go

⁷ Tagore Rabindranath MY SCHOOL" (lecture delivered in America published in Personality London: MacMillan, 1933)

⁸ www.contentwriter.in/article/book-reviews/tagore-education.htm

home carrying with them a few pages of machine made learning”⁸.

Tagore emphasized on the physical development of children along with the education, which he found was missing because of joyless education system. In this concern he writes, “*human beings need food and not air to satisfy their hunger but they also need air properly to digest their food.*”⁹ He makes people realize that the small children are burdened with tons of books, “*from childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded backs.*”¹⁰ He highlighted the fact of education system and guided to save the existing education system from the danger of narrow people, time and place.

For Tagore’s the aim of education is to achieve fulfillment and completeness as similar of providing an individual with the satisfactory means of living without which person fails to achieve the basic requirements of life. Tagore imagined that the development of man is possible only in a restriction free environment as the aim of education is not only the development of intellect but also focuses on the development of the aesthetic nature and creativity. He connected freedom and creativity for the development of person, the more the man is associated to nature the more they will come towards humanity. Tagore writes:

*To read without thinking is like accumulating building materials without building anything. We instantly climb to the top of our pile and beat it down incessantly for two years, until it becomes level and somewhat become level and somewhat resembles the flat roof of a house*¹¹

The appearance of Tagore as an educationist is entirely concerned to his personal experience and exposure in his entire life. He was fascinated with the diverse culture he met in his daily life . The following poem from Gitanjali [Song offerings], brings together the ideals the poet kept before the nation, mankind, and educational institutions. The poem expresses Tagore’s goals for international education. He writes:

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls Where words come out from the depth of truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action---Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.....;*¹².

Tagore’s visionary approach and the great educationist in him resolved the growing problem like attendance, use of other unfair means during examination, teaching methodology of teachers, discipline etc. of present education system. He suggested the solutions to solve the problems in a noble way. He recommended that the freedom to students in a defined manner during the teaching learning can overcome the issues. Thus, Tagore's educational philosophy is challenging but adventurous. It is regretted that his ideas are not completely applied the formulated in the Indian education system.

There is no doubt that Tagore’s pre- eminence as a poet and writer will continue to be recognized down the ages. When the educational policies formulated by Tagore are taken into account it becomes evident that lot of reform are yet to

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Tagore, R.N. – Towards Universal Man Ed by Prof. Humayun Kabir P-67

¹¹ <http://espada-exilio.blogspot.in/2012/01/rabindranath-tagore-1861-1941>

¹² Tagore, Rabindranath GITANJALI: Selected Poems "Song Offerings"

be implemented in upgrading the Indian education system. His vision of education, based on the concept of religion of man, is basically not bound to any time frame, and hence can be revived or re-established in any part of the world at any point of time. Tagore gave and the essays he wrote from 1919 to 1936 he tried to answer this question. In his own words:

*We must try to understand how Indian genius expressed itself [...] Unless we try to put these together and discover the integrating factors behind these diverse streams of thought and make them a subject of study at our universities, we would only be borrowing knowledge from abroad. The natural habitat for knowledge is where it is produced. The main task of universities is to produce knowledge, its dissemination is its secondary function. We must invite those intellectuals and scholars to our universities who are engaged in research, invention or creative activity. While nations sought primarily to give their citizens a means of livelihood through education.*¹³

CONCLUSION

It is important to try and realize the value of Rabindranath Tagore's vision on education. The time had thus come, to attempt a change in the aims of university education, and understand the ways to make education real and our life force.

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¹³ Jha, Narmadeshwar (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 3/4, 1994 p- 12

